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Report of the Multi-year Expert Meeting on Transport, Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation on its fifth session

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 23–24 October 2017

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Introduction

The fifth session of the Multi-year Expert Meeting on Transport, Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation was held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, from 23 to 24 October 2017.

I. Chair's summary

A. Opening plenary

1. In her opening statement, the Director of the Division on Technology and Logistics noted that this session of the Multi-year Expert Meeting was taking place at a pivotal juncture, and was the first of four sessions until the next session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Its aim was to discuss and gain key insights on the linkages between, on the one hand, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals and, on the other hand, international transport and trade facilitation. UNCTAD studies had shown that efficient international transport and trade facilitation were ever more important in the current trading environment.

2. UNCTAD participated actively in relevant global policy dialogues and conferences, such as, in 2016, the twenty-second Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Global Sustainable Transport Conference convened by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. UNCTAD also carried out important technical assistance and capacity-building programmes that supported trade logistics reforms. Its largest technical assistance programme, the Automated System for Customs Data, had direct positive impacts on trade efficiency, revenue collection, compliance and the transparency of import and export procedures.

3. The Chief of the Trade Logistics Branch highlighted that the linkages between trade logistics and sustainable development had several dimensions. First, efficient transport and trade facilitation had impacts on trade. Second, trade logistics had a direct positive bearing on employment, transparency, investment and human and institutional capacities. Third, transport operations and growing trade generated environmental and social externalities, which required response measures and adaptation. The Chief noted that, in many cases, investments in transport and trade facilitation reforms should go together.

B. Trade logistics and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
(Agenda item 3)

4. The first panellist of the initial informal session presented the new aid for trade strategy in Germany, which had been revised in 2016 to integrate elements of the 2030 Agenda. Its implementation was organized on three levels, as follows: implementation and impact in Germany; impact on other countries and global public goods; and support for other countries. Germany had a comprehensive system of reporting and sustainability impact assessments, and provided voluntary reports to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. In the area of trade facilitation, national strategy focused on three areas, namely policy consultations, customs procedures and quality and security standards. At the twenty-third Conference of the Parties, to be held in Germany, the growing importance of sustainable cities, transport and mobility would be highlighted during a transport day and a round table on Goal 11.

5. The second panellist provided a review of sustainable transport and trade facilitation in Guatemala. The national plan prioritized Goals 8 and 9, focusing on the promotion of sustainable economic growth and infrastructure. The latter was considered of particular importance for the economic development of Guatemala, along with trade facilitation, in order to improve connectivity to neighbouring countries as well as markets abroad.

The panellist expressed appreciation to UNCTAD for support provided in recent years, including in the area of port reform and trade facilitation.

6. During the ensuing interactive discussion, one participant queried how best to ensure involvement and collaboration with the private sector. Panellists noted that the private sector needed to be involved from the early stages in the planning of projects. In addition, the secretariat noted that the private sector should be engaged directly at the global level in initiatives such as the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business and the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation. In order to influence global decisions, it was often also necessary for the private sector to work through respective national Government representatives at international forums such as the International Maritime Organization and the World Trade Organization.

7. With regard to a query on ways to measure the impact of policies and projects on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, some panellists stated that there were some reporting requirements under the United Nations, as well as, for example, the World Trade Organization. However, it was often difficult to gather and interpret the necessary national statistics. International organizations such as UNCTAD could play a positive role in supporting the development and measurement of relevant indicators.

8. In addition, in response to one query on the regional dimension of trade logistics and its impact on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, some panellists agreed that this was an important topic, and that international cooperation needed to keep in mind cross-border challenges and solutions in the area of trade logistics.

9. One delegate highlighted the challenges that small island developing States might face in combating pollution from international shipping. In this regard, some panellists and the secretariat detailed that while some of the responsibilities in this area lay with other international organizations, UNCTAD provided research and advisory services.

10. The secretariat presented a new portfolio of tools dedicated to sustainable freight transport, the sustainable freight transport toolkit, aimed at building the capacity of developing countries to enable a reorientation towards sustainable freight transport, through sound transport policies, measures and actions and financing mechanisms. The toolkit featured three main products, namely a web portal, a training package and the UNCTAD Framework for Sustainable Freight Transport. Together, these instruments aimed to build and strengthen the capacity of all key freight transport stakeholders (see https://unctadsftportal.com and https://sft-framework.org).

11. The ensuing discussion highlighted significant interest in the toolkit. Several participants noted that this was an important tool for developing countries, and noted that resources might need to be allocated to allow for its translation into other languages, and to adapt it to situations in different counties. In response to a query on the latter, the secretariat confirmed that the toolkit was intended to be adapted to the needs of developing countries. Finally, the Chair highlighted the importance of making available resources to ensure that financing was assured for such projects and tools.

Trade facilitation and development

12. At the second informal session, the secretariat highlighted the relationship between trade facilitation and sustainable development. Trade facilitation had an impact on revenue collection, security and compliance, and fostered communication between governmental agencies, thereby supporting the achievement of Goals 9 and 16. Trade facilitation also helped to promote good governance, and improved transparency, creating a system that traders and countries could trust. With the launch of trade portals in various countries and cities worldwide, UNCTAD was contributing to these Goals (see http://tradeportal.eregulations.org/?l=en). Trade facilitation also supported public–private partnerships, which contributed to the achievement of Goal 17. For instance, UNCTAD promoted dialogues between all trade facilitation stakeholders through its empowerment programme for national trade facilitation committees. Trade facilitation helped to formalize trade, empower women entrepreneurs and strengthen regional integration. The work of UNCTAD over many years with the East African Community, with the support of diverse donors, was a good example in this regard.

13. The first panellist addressed the progress made and difficulties faced by Liberia in implementing trade facilitation reforms in recent years. A Trade Facilitation Forum had been established in 2013, focused on four core areas, namely facilitation, regulation, policy and capacity development. The Forum had successfully advocated for the reduction of 19 non-tariff barriers. With support from UNCTAD and the International Finance Corporation, Liberia had drafted a new customs code and put in place a national trade facilitation committee, expanding on the mandate and membership of the Trade Facilitation Forum. The UNCTAD empowerment programme for national trade facilitation committees had already ensured results in the performance of the private sector in Liberia, which had proactively engaged with the Government whenever a new regulation or procedure had been introduced without consultation or stakeholder participation or even implemented without prior notice.

14. The second panellist highlighted the key interest of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in using trade facilitation as an enabler for development. Through a unique partnership arrangement with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, UNCTAD and the World Customs Organization had developed a capacity-building programme for supporting developing countries in the implementation of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation. The results achieved to date through this programme were a good example, as the programme utilized the best resources of each partner to help countries implement their trade facilitation reforms.

15. The third panellist presented the example of trade facilitation reforms undertaken in Afghanistan since 2002 to underscore that trade facilitation was a long-term endeavour. Results could be achieved if all key stakeholders, not only customs, were engaged, since customs reforms alone would not significantly improve the trade facilitation performance of a country. For the automation of procedures in Afghanistan, the use of the Automated System for Customs Data had been key to the success of the reform for the following three reasons: the system had been proven in over 80 countries; it allowed for step-by-step implementation through its modular approach; and it was already available in Farsi.

16. The fourth panellist detailed the relationship between the Sustainable Development Goals and the work of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business. The Centre had contributed to the establishment of 440 standards aimed at promoting electronic trade, which contributed to the achievement of Goal 17 and environmental goals. For instance, a vessel entering a port exchanged 130,000 messages; each time such messages were exchanged electronically, two boxes of paper were saved. In addition, projects that improved the transparency of agricultural supply chains contributed to the achievement of Goal 2. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe was currently working on a project on the traceability of textile value chains, which contributed to the achievement of Goal 12. Finally, the creation of standards for the exchange of information on fisheries, from vessels directly to the controlling authority, contributed to the achievement of Goal 14.

17. One delegate presented the progress made and difficulties faced in Cameroon in implementing trade and transport facilitation reforms in recent years. While the improvement of road and maritime infrastructure was progressing, the issue of security in transport remained high on the agenda. The delegate expressed appreciation to UNCTAD for capacity-building support provided through the empowerment programme for national trade facilitation committees.

18. Another delegate detailed how reforms regarding the provisions of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation could be phased, to ensure their successful implementation. To ensure that reforms moved forward, decisiveness, leadership, infrastructure, information and communications technology, financial policy and political support were needed, as well as a well-defined action plan.

19. During the ensuing discussion, one participant highlighted the importance of promoting better coordination among international agencies and donors. The representative of a regional commission noted different initiatives to ensure coordination among United Nations agencies, such as the memorandum of understanding between the International Trade Centre, UNCTAD and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

The secretariat noted that many of the challenges implied by a lack of coordination could be overcome by ensuring donor coordination at the national level, or at both the national and international levels, and not solely at the international level.

20. Some participants and delegates highlighted the impact that single windows could have on development in a country. However, they also pointed out the challenges related to the implementation of single windows in trade facilitation, not only at the national level, but also regarding the connectivity of single windows among different countries.

21. A few delegates elaborated on the importance of having multilateral agreements on transport and security issues.

22. Some participants and delegates noted that the involvement of the private sector was essential for the successful implementation of trade facilitation reforms.

23. During their concluding remarks, the panellists emphasized that the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals required the promotion of evidence-based policies, such as for trade facilitation. Trade facilitation could be seen as a journey, with each country at a different position; the journey did not have an end, as there would always be a way to continue to ease trade. High-level political support was key to ensuring progress throughout the journey.

Climate change impacts and adaptation for key coastal transport infrastructure, and regulatory approaches to ship-source pollution control

24. The third informal session was chaired by the Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur. Opening the session, the secretariat highlighted the role of sustainable and resilient transport, as one of the cross-cutting issues of relevance for achieving progress towards several of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets. In particular, climate-related risk assessments and adaptation were important for seaports and airports in small island developing States, including in the context of Goals 9 and 13 and target 1.5, as well as of regulatory measures in support of Goal 14, including those related to ship-source pollution control and carbon dioxide emission reduction from international shipping. Climate variability and change, including factors such as sea level rise, extreme weather events and changes in precipitation and temperature, might have major impacts on coastal transport infrastructure, posing development threats, in particular for the least developed countries and small island developing States that, due to their location and geographic features, were both particularly exposed and vulnerable to climatic factors, including the impacts of storms and marine flooding. At the same time, in these countries, key coastal transport infrastructure, notably ports and airports, were lifelines for food, energy, external trade and tourism. Drawing on relevant earlier research and consensus-building activities, ongoing work by UNCTAD since 2008 with a focus on climate change-related impacts and adaptation for key coastal transport infrastructure in small island developing States in the Caribbean region included a technical assistance project that aimed to develop a transferable methodology for assessing climate-related risk and vulnerability, with a view to identifying effective adaptation options (see http://www.un.org/esa/devaccount/projects/2014/1415O.html). The project was based on a case study approach; preliminary results suggested, for instance, that in Jamaica, the main seaport in Kingston and one of the major airports, accounting for 70 per cent of tourist arrivals, appeared to be vulnerable under all scenarios; and in Saint Lucia, all international transportation assets were vulnerable to marine flooding under extreme events and different climate change scenarios.

25. The first panellist presented a number of detailed findings from the Large-scale Integrated Sea-level and Coastal Assessment Tool of the European Joint Research Centre, which could help inform decision-making in relation to sustainable maritime transport in small island developing States in the context of climate change. The panellist presented results from state-of-the art flood modelling, with special reference to the Caribbean region; factors taken into account included coastal risks and challenges, including sea level rise and socioeconomic development in coastal zones; hazard assessments; sea level extremes and tropical cyclones; sea level rise projections; total water level projections and climate extremes. Climate change projections specific to the Caribbean region indicated that direct impacts, including those associated with coastal and river floods, extreme weather events,

wildfires, windstorms and impacts on crops and fisheries, without considering tipping points and indirect impacts, were likely to increase tenfold by 2100. The panellist reiterated the need to acknowledge the challenging nature of coastal adaptation in view of climate change, as well as the need to urgently move towards a timely response, ensuring coordinated and fair measures. There was a need to collect better data, including on coastal elevation and socioeconomic factors, and to carry out further research to obtain a better understanding of appropriate adaptation measures.

26. The second panellist addressed climate change and disaster risk management for the coastal transport infrastructure of island States in the Caribbean region. Seaports and airports linking the region to the world provided value and contributed to tourism and trade, energy and food security, foreign direct investment, revenue collection, employment, commerce and agriculture. Travel and tourism, for instance, provided high levels of economic contributions, in particular in some island States. However, all seaports in the region, as well as several airports, were at risk due to locations near the sea and/or in flood-prone areas. Recent anomalies, such as the early start of the hurricane season in 2017 and the devastating effects of hurricanes Irma and Maria in September, brought the vulnerability of countries in the Caribbean region into sharp focus. Against this background, building resilience needed to be prioritized. The panellist stressed that seaports and airports should not be considered individually and/or in isolation, but rather as an interdependent network, and that resilience-building should be approached in an integrated manner. Finally, the panellist expressed appreciation to UNCTAD for its important and valuable work in the Caribbean region, and highlighted the need to continue and strengthen such work and to disseminate lessons that could help in enhanced decision-making.

27. With regard to ship-source pollution control and the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions from international shipping, the third panellist provided an overview of regulatory developments in support of the 2030 Agenda, in particular Goals 13 and 14. The role of the International Maritime Organization included ensuring that shipping continued to make its contributions to the global economy without upsetting the delicate balance of human activities and the capacity of maintaining the health and diversity of oceans in the long term. The Organization had developed a number of measures designed to control emissions from the shipping sector, regulated under annex VI of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, and areas covered included air pollution, energy efficiency and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from ships. There was increasing pressure to reduce such emissions, and the Organization continued to address this matter, in particular through recent work on outlining the structure of an initial reduction strategy.

28. With regard to queries on concrete infrastructure-related measures needed to respond to threats and adapt to the effects of climate change in small island developing States and other vulnerable countries, the panellists noted that, due to physical constraints, the relocation of infrastructure assets often would not be an option for small island developing States. Various political, social and economic factors also needed to be considered, and choices could be difficult to make. Small design modifications could at times have a significant impact on resilience-building, yet progress in identifying relevant infrastructure adaptation measures could only be made based on an appropriate and evidence-based understanding of impacts, which varied according to a number of factors. In this context, further research and better information, including well-targeted pilot studies, were required. As an important initial step, climate change considerations needed to be mainstreamed into regular port operations and infrastructure planning processes.

29. Some participants and panellists noted that it was important to keep in mind possible increases in shipping costs that could arise from new international environmental measures. Any such increases would be passed on to recipients and, in particular for small island developing States, such costs could be disproportionally high. In this context, a few delegates and panellists recognized the need for technical assistance programmes and other forms of cooperation that supported port State authorities in ensuring the implementation of international environmental regulations.

Sustainable freight transport: A cross-cutting enabler in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

30. During the fourth informal session, the experts considered the linkages between freight transport and the Sustainable Development Goals, and how best to leverage the sustainable freight transport dividend to implement the 2030 Agenda. There was broad agreement that sustainable transport, including freight transport, was a sustainable development prerequisite and an enabler of global processes such as the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. By capitalizing upon the co-benefits at the interface of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability, freight transport could generate significant sustainable development gains.

31. The first panellist clarified the nexus between the Sustainable Development Goals and freight transport, emphasizing the need to improve understanding of the linkages between, on the one hand, economic growth, industrialization, infrastructure development, logistics and supply chain spatial configurations and, on the other hand, the freight transport sector and related externalities. He noted that, if left unchecked, the sector's carbon emissions would double by 2050, yet limiting the increase in the global average temperature to below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels required that the sector significantly reduce its emissions. Freight transport therefore had significant potential for climate change mitigation and sustainable development, and the panellist stressed that tapping into this potential should be pursued and guided by existing sustainable freight transport measures. The private sector, supported by Governments, including through public–private partnerships, had an important role in implementing sustainable freight transport measures, given its various levers for intervention. Apart from hard infrastructure challenges, obstacles to sustainable freight transport in developing countries were often related to soft infrastructure, and addressing related challenges required stepping up capacity-building and awareness raising efforts, as well as promoting partnerships, collaboration, data collection and information sharing, good practice and case study dissemination and recognition schemes. UNCTAD, through the sustainable freight transport toolkit, including the capacity-building programme and Framework for Sustainable Freight Transport, could help address such challenges.

32. The second panellist highlighted the importance of measuring performance, including sustainability performance, to ensure informed policymaking processes. The Ports Observatory for Performance Indicator Analysis project of the European Commission, providing a data observatory for the European port industry, set a concrete example of effective collaboration between academia, scientists, the port industry, businesses and technology providers in support of performance measurement. Enabled by a user-friendly online interface, the project provided a data collection, management and analysis platform and a benchmarking tool, along with meeting stakeholder confidentiality and knowledge management needs. The benchmarking tool allowed individual ports to compare their performances with European Union averages and ports in other regions. Various aspects monitored through the project supported the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals as they helped to assess the sustainability performance of ports, including indicators on market trends and structure, socioeconomic patterns, environmental management, security, health and occupational safety, logistics operations, governance, maritime access and fluidity and user satisfaction levels. Measuring performance, gaining insights into trends and patterns and deriving business intelligence through the project, or similar information and communications technology-based solutions, created significant value addition. However, to leverage such tools, quality and reliable data were key. Therefore, investing in data collection, acquisition and refinement was crucial, as was the need to build trust between relevant stakeholders and data contributors. Collaboration with UNCTAD could help address some data-related challenges and promote the use of the project platform worldwide.

33. The third panellist explored the perspective of multilateral development banks, which increasingly focused on sustainable transport. Reflecting this commitment, the Islamic Development Bank, for example, had adopted a transport sector strategy to help developing countries formulate sustainable transport policies. The Bank was ready to create

more financing facilities for sustainable transport. Priority areas identified in the strategy of the Bank included road safety, social inclusion, economic growth, regional integration and sustainable transport. As priorities varied by region and country, a holistic and value chain approach to measuring the sustainability of projects was required. In order to achieve sustainable transport and value chains, the following were important: connectivity; cross-border and integrated multimodal logistics systems; dialogue at all levels, including with the private sector; and the involvement of small and medium-sized enterprises and civil society. Partnerships that promoted the effective use of resources and greater and wider impacts and that included people, or the citizen dimension, needed to be pursued. Overall, balancing financial sustainability with development impacts, and cooperation with relevant partners, including UNCTAD, underpinned the Bank's strategy.

34. The fourth panellist highlighted progress achieved to date in the field of sustainable freight transport and challenges faced in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, a landlocked country. Regional economic integration and interconnectivity, including rural–urban connectivity, were important for national sustainable development, for example for achieving Goals 2 and 9. Investments had been made in the transport sector and a number of green freight and logistics capacity-building programmes had been carried out. Challenges remained, however, in relation to road infrastructure, vehicle fuel standards, budget constraints and the relatively higher costs of environmental measures, especially for small truck operators. There was a need for technology transfer, financial assistance and government incentives, in particular for the private sector, as well as human resource development and technical assistance. The panellist noted that the sustainable freight transport toolkit could provide good support in this regard.

35. The fifth panellist underscored that inadequate port infrastructure, poor conditions of port and cargo handling equipment, low shipping connectivity and environmental damage caused by ships in the Mozambique Channel constituted major challenges for the Comoros. Prohibitive transport costs were also problematic, given their impact on the cost of living. While various measures had been initiated to address concerns related to trade facilitation and oil pollution, other challenges remained, such as those related to seaport and airport infrastructure and modernization and to maritime area monitoring.

36. One delegate highlighted the importance of a globalized infrastructure framework when addressing infrastructure development and financing.

37. The representative of one non-governmental organization stressed that UNCTAD could support the total system or value chain approach to sustainability by linking and leveraging supply chain and transport and trade facilitation sustainability-related data. The secretariat emphasized that tailored solutions adapted to local conditions should be favoured when implementing sustainable freight transport solutions.

38. Some experts noted that the sustainable freight transport toolkit appeared useful and promising and that it should be promoted widely. Finally, a few experts noted that, in view of their development plans, developing countries were well positioned to overcome sustainability challenges, including with regard to transport infrastructure development.

C. Conclusion

39. In his concluding remarks, the Chair summarized key messages from the presentations and discussions, highlighting the interlinkages between different dimensions of trade logistics, notably hard infrastructure investments and the human and institutional capacities and reforms needed to achieve trade and transport facilitation.

40. The key mechanisms through which trade logistics had an impact on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals were threefold, as follows: there were impacts on trade, as efficient trade logistics was increasingly important for trade-driven development; there were direct impacts of trade facilitation reforms and transport investments on employment, transparency, infrastructure and the general human and institutional capacity development of countries; and there were potential negative

externalities related to, inter alia, pollution, safety and climate change, with the associated need to adapt and mitigate.

41. Throughout the session, experts had highlighted the importance of continuing and, where possible, expanding UNCTAD support to developing countries in the area of trade logistics. Experts had expressed their appreciation for the sustainable freight transport toolkit and UNCTAD was encouraged to seek sufficient funding for its implementation, adapted to the specific needs of different member States.

II. Organizational matters

A. Election of officers

(Agenda item 1)

42. At its opening plenary, on 23 October 2017, the Multi-year Expert Meeting on Transport, Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation elected Mr. Alfredo Suescum (Panama) as its Chair and Ms. Ibtissam Hassan (Egypt) as its Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur.

B. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

(Agenda item 2)

43. Also at its opening plenary, the Multi-year Expert Meeting adopted the provisional agenda for the session (TD/B/C.I/MEM.7/13). The agenda was thus as follows:

1. Election of officers
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work
3. Trade logistics and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
4. Adoption of the report of the meeting

C. Outcome of the session

44. Also at its opening plenary, the Multi-year Expert Meeting agreed that the Chair should summarize the discussions.

D. Adoption of the report of the meeting

(Agenda item 4)

45. At its closing plenary, on 24 October 2017, the Multi-year Expert Meeting authorized the Vice-Chair-cum-Rapporteur to finalize the report after the conclusion of the session.

Annex

Attendance*

1. Representatives of the following States members of UNCTAD attended the session:

Algeria	Guatemala
Angola	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Argentina	Kazakhstan
Austria	Kuwait
Brazil	Lao People's Democratic Republic
Brunei Darussalam	Liberia
Cameroon	Madagascar
Chile	Panama
China	Philippines
Comoros	Spain
Congo	Sri Lanka
Costa Rica	Turkey
Germany	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

2. Representatives of the following non-member observer State attended the session:

State of Palestine

3. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented at the session:

African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
European Union
Islamic Development Bank
Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
Organization of Islamic Cooperation
Union of African Shippers' Councils

4. The following United Nations organs, bodies and programmes were represented at the session:

Economic Commission for Europe
International Trade Centre

5. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations attended the session:

General category

International Network for Standardization of Higher Education Degrees
International Road Transport Union

Special category

European Shippers' Councils
International Air Transport Association

Other

World Economic Forum

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* This attendance list contains registered participants. For the list of participants, see TD/B/C.I/MEM.7/INF.5.